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SUBJECT: FIRST OPEN SESSION OF DINK MURDER TRIAL

REF: A. A. 07 ISTANBUL 0577

¶B. B. 07 ISTANBUL 0897

¶1. The sixth session of the trial of the accused murderers of Agos newspaper editor Hrant Dink convened on July 7 and was for the first time open to the public, since the primary murder suspect, Ogun Samast, is no longer a minor. In addition to U.S. Consulate General Istanbul observers, members of the Hrant Dink family and members of the Turkish and European Parliaments attended the proceedings. Eleven suspects were present at the trial, while eight remained in jail. Three suspects (Ogun Samast, Erhan Tuncel, and Yasin Hayal) responded to questioning and two witnesses (Hayal's uncle Coskun Igci and Hakki Bahadir Cihan) testified. The major revelation was Igci's testimony that he informed gendarmerie officers in Trabzon at least four times prior to October 2006 of Hayal's intention to assassinate Dink and tried to dissuade Hayal of his plans.

¶2. From time to time the trial descended into buffoonery, mostly at the instigation of Hayal's lawyer, Fuat Turgut. Turgut, known in legal circles for his flamboyant style of advocacy, was dressed in a fluorescent green shirt and bright red tie and hinted at Armenian and Jewish involvement in Dink's murder. For example, even after the accused Tuncel gruffly corrected Turgut's persistent assertions that his girlfriend was Israeli, Turgut continued to ask questions in which he embedded the supposition. During his questioning of Samast, Turgut asked if the Turkish-Armenian writer Etyen Mahcupyan had called Samast while he was in front of the Agos office prior to murdering Dink. The question prompted Samast to respond sarcastically that in fact it was the singer Jennifer Lopez who had called him.

¶3. Comment: The next hearing in the trial is scheduled for October 13, 2008. Although such scheduling may appear tortuously languid to observers accustomed to the common law trial system utilized in the U.S., this pace is standard in the Turkish justice system. For instance, it took four years of trial for the same tribunal to find Al Qaeda members guilty of the 2003 bombings of the British Consulate and two Istanbul synagogues. End Comment.

WIENER